ROYAL *TAMGA*-SIGNS OF BOSPORUS II-III CENTURIES AS A RESULT OF THE BARBARIZATION

BY

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ABSTRACT

[AR] **علامات التامغا الملكية في مضيق البوسفور خلال القرنين الثاني والثالث**

تُقدم هذه الدراسة تحليل استعمال «التامغا» الملكية على مضيق البوسفور. ويرتبط ظهور التامغا الملكية كتأثير لقبائل سارماتيا القاطنة حول مضيق البوسفور مع النخبة الحاكمة الأصلية في المنطقة. ويحلل المقال العلامات الملكية على اللوحات والأواني الفخارية. «التامغا» تم نحتها على ألواح رسمية عليها نقوش يونانية، ويُعتقد أن «لتامغا» على الألواح تم استبدالها باسم الملك. ويمكن صنع «التامغا» من مواد برونزية، بالإضافة إلى المطبوعات الذهبية المصنوعة في ورش الصناعة في البوسفور، وهي شبيهة بتلك في أحزمة ملوك البوسفور. وقد أصبحت هذه العلامات مميزة للغاية للدلالة علي الانتماء إلى عناصر الجيش أو كدلالة علي حراس أو أقارب ملك البوسفور. وقد عارضت **(N. V. ZAVOLOKINA)** الرأي القائل أن «التامغا» الموجودة علي الألواح كانت عبارة عن علامات ملكية، واقترحت أن مثل هذه العلامات لا يمكن أن تكون أختام ملكية، وأنها عبارة عن أختام خاصة بقبيلتين مهاجرتين من عائلة سارماتيا. وتقدم هذه المقالة تفسيراً واضحاً يُخالف رأيها، لأنه بفضل استخدام "التامغا" من قبل ملوك البوسفور، تم إضفاء الشرعية على قوة ملك البوسفور في نظر السكان البرابرة القاطنين في البوسفور من خلال عبادة ملك البوسفور، والتي تم التعبير عنها في أشكال أخري من خلال صورة «التامغا» الملكية، والتي عكست بالتأكيد استجابة أذهان المستوطنين السارمات على أراضي البوسفور. وقد أظهرت "التامغا" روابط الصلة للملك مع عشائر سارمات.

[EN] This study is devoted to the analysis of the tradition of the royal *tamgas* on the Bosporus. The appearance of the royal *tamgas* is associated with the sarmatization of the Bosporus and the dynastic ties of the ruling elite with the Sarmatian tribes. In this paper, I analyze the royal signs on plates and buckles. *Tamgas* were carved on official slabs with Greek inscriptions. It is believed that the tamga on the slab replaced the name of the king. Bronze elements of belt sets with *tamgas* of Bosporan kings, as well as gold prints, could be made in Bosporan workshops. These signs became a convenient sign of belonging to the army or guard of the Bosporan king or his relative. N. V.Zavoikina disputed the version that the tamgas on the slabs were royal signs. She suggested that such signs could not be royal but the signs of two clans of the Sarmatian migrants. The paper provides arguments against her opinion. Thanks to the use of tamga by Bosporan kings, the power of the Bosporan king was legitimized in the eyes of the barbarian population of Bosporus. The cult of the Bosporan king, expressed, among other things, by the image of the royal *tamgas*, certainly found a response in the minds of the Sarmatian settlers on the territory of Bosporus. *Tamgas* showed the kinship ties of the king with the Sarmatian clans.

KEYWORDS: Bosporan kingdom, *tamgas*, Sarmatians, ideology, Barbarization, Sarmatization, belts, plates.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sarmatian *tamgas* gained popularity in Eastern Europe from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD. They spread among Iranian-speaking nomads, their neighbors, and migrants from Central Asia. According to many researchers, *tamgas* were signs of collective belonging [clan] in the Sarmatian world[1]. They could be signs of ownership, signs of presence, or power.

Bosporus-a Greek kingdom in the Crimea and adjacent areas of the Eastern Azov region-was an example of the synthesis of ancient and barbaric cultures. In the first centuries of our era, Sarmatian *tamgas* appeared in the Bosporus. Special attention is drawn to the so–called royal *tamgas* of Bosporus associated with the rulers of this kingdom. The appearance of the royal *tamgas* was associated with the sarmatization of the Bosporus and the dynastic ties of the ruling elite with the Sarmatian tribes[2]. We could see the so-called royal signs on the plates and buckles. Researchers pay special attention to two forms of *tamgas*: *tamgas* on steles (both with and without inscriptions) and tamgo-like signs on buckles.

II. DESCRIPTION

Tamgas are carved on official slabs with Greek inscriptions. Six of such plates were known in Tanais; one came from Hermonassa. They are dated from 163 AD to 236 AD.

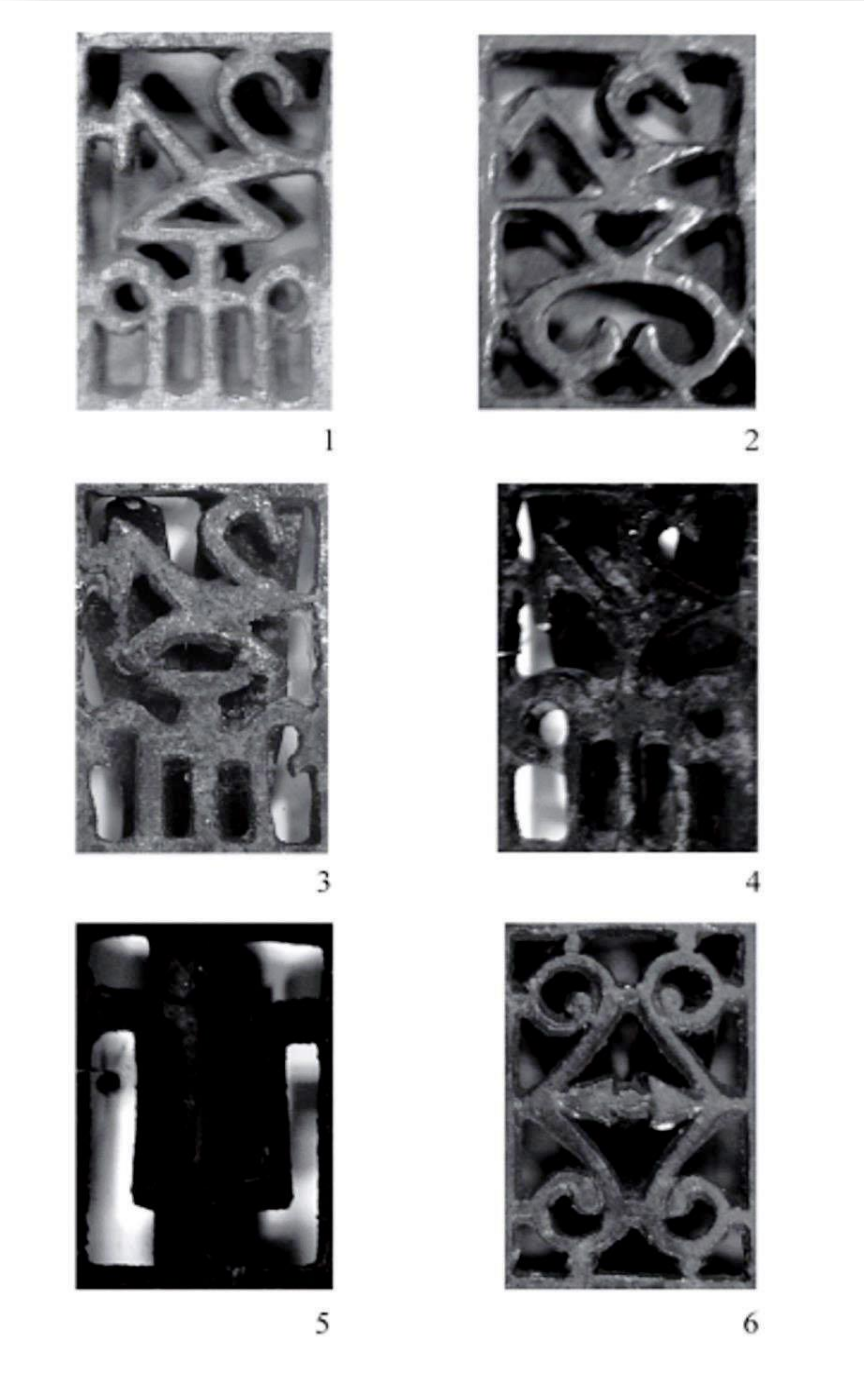
They are attributed to the Bosporan kings Remetalus, Evpator, Sauromat II, Reskuporid II and Ininfimei **[FIGURES 1 & 5].**

[1] YATSENKO & ROGOZHINSKII 2021.

[2] YATSENKO 2001: 45-60; SHAROV 2013; KOZLOVSKAYA & ILYASHENKO 2018.

[FIGURE 1]: **Four plates without inscriptions with royal *tamgas* from Tanais.**
VDOVCHENKOV 2016: FIG. 1.

It is believed that the tamga on the plate replaced the name of the king. Bronze elements of belt sets with *tamgas* of Bosporan kings and gold prints could be made in Bosporan workshops and awarded **[FIGURE 2]**. The manufacture of such belts might begin during the reign of Rimitalka, but the main part of the buckles dates back to the reign of Tiberius Julius Evpator. They are found mainly in Crimea, but there are also on the Asian part of the Bosporus.



[FIGURE 2]: Types of tamga on bronze buckles and belt tips.
TREISTER 2011: 306.

The question then arises – what meaning was invested in the *tamgas* on belts and belt tips? These belts did not belong to kings and their relatives but to ordinary residents. The belt is a symbol of dependence in the Iranian world. The tamga on the belt is a sign of dependence on some ruler or military leader. The finds of the tamga on the belt tell us about the subordination to the bearer of this tamga[3]. Tying a belt meant entering the service of the tsar to recognize their obligations. Apparently, the same idea was used to design the belts of the guards on the Bosporus. These signs became a very convenient sign of belonging to the army or guard of the Bosporan tsar or his relative.

III. DISCUSSION

N. V. Zavoikina disputed the version that the *tamgas* on the slabs were royal signs. She suggested that such signs could not be royal but the signs of four families of two clans of the Tanaites[4]. Tanaites were Sarmatian settlers in Tanais. They were settled in Tanais, divided by ethnicity into two communities, Hellenes and Tanaites, after the middle of the II century AD.

N.V.Zavoikina reported the disproportion of plates with *tamgas* and without *tamgas*. For the Bosporan king Evpator, 4 plates are known, and only one has a tamga. Sauromat II has 40 plates, and only 3 with *tamgas*. Reskuporid II has 23 plates, and one with a tamga. Inifimei has 4 plates without *tamgas* and 3 with *tamgas*. That is, the clear predominance of plates without tamga– 68 versus 7. N. V. Zavoikina drew attention to the absence of «royal tamga» on the coins of the times of the four mentioned kings.

But Bosporus was in a barbaric environment and was forced to use any means to normalize relations with the Sarmatians, including symbolic means. These *tamgas* were located mainly in the Asian part of the Bosporus, i.e., where there were more barbarians for whom these *tamgas* were designed. There was no point in placing *tamgas* on coins because the barbarian population was alien to the idea of monetary circulation, and the symbols placed on coins could hardly reach them. Another thing was the plates with official inscriptions.

N.V. Zavoikina did not pay attention to the anepigraphic plates, which were probably embedded in the defensive walls **[FIGURE 1]**. The sign itself, embedded in the plate without inscriptions, without an accompanying inscription, suggests that its meaning was obvious to contemporaries, and it is unlikely that it is a sign of some aristocratic families. It is much more likely that the tsar possessed such a sign than an influential representative of the elite of Sarmatian origin.

A convincing argument against the position of N.V. Zavoikina was given by M. Yu. Treister **[FIGURE 3]**[5]. On two marble slabs framed by the figures of Victoria on the globe with a wreath and a palm branch in her hands, one or two tamga-like signs were depicted in relief. M.Yu.

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[3] IVANCHIK 2001: 160.

[4] ZAVOIKINA 2013: 191-203.

[5] TREISTER 2011: 321-327.

Treister proved that the Bosporus images of Victoria on the globe (or without) with a wreath in his hand, crowning a horseman or a foot soldier, or a tamga-like sign (signs), should be more likely to be considered in the context of state military victories, one way or another connected with the king power[6]. It is impossible to imagine the placement on these two plates with the figures of Victoria of signs not of kings but simply of some nobility.

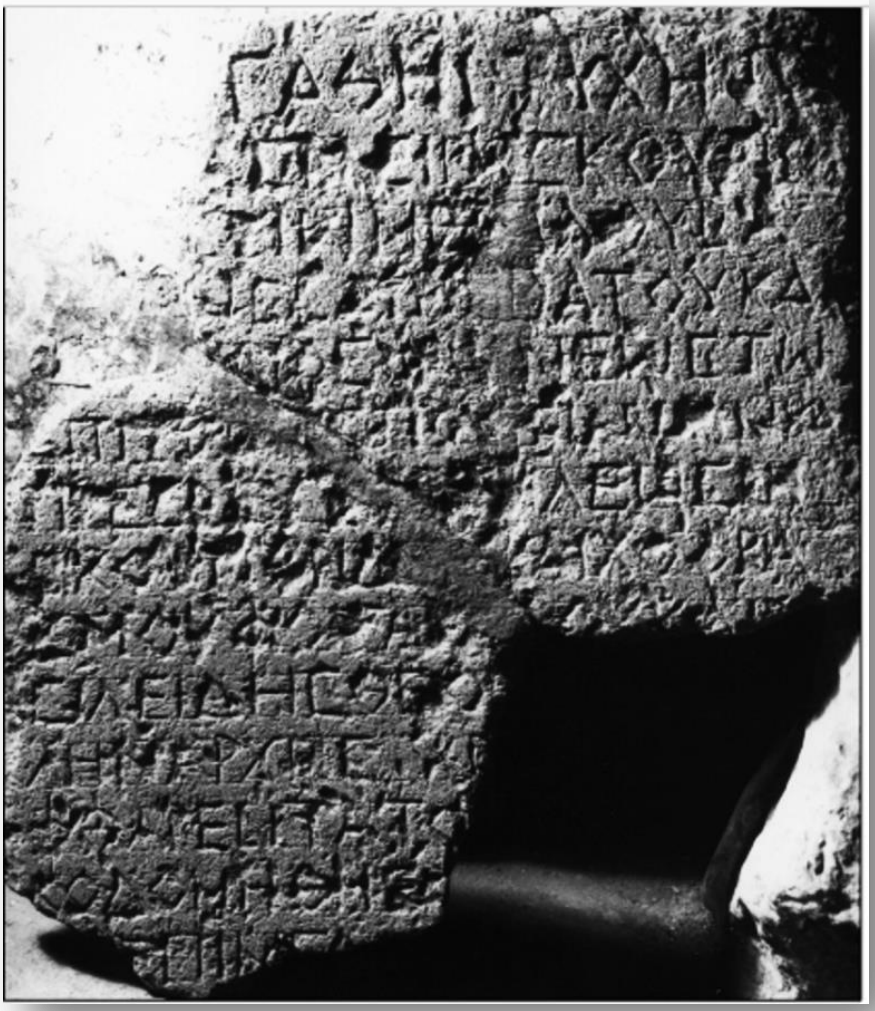
[FIGURE 3]: Slabs depicting Victoria and *tamga*-shaped signs from Germonassa: 1–Kerch, Lapidarium; 2-State. Hermitage. TREISTER 2011: 326-327

[6] TREISTER 2011: 326-327

The geography of the area of the *tamga*-signs carved on slabs with official Greek inscriptions, on anepigraphic embedded slabs, as well as on anepigraphic slabs with relief images of Victoria figures, included not only Tanais but also Asian Bosporan centers – Phanagoria and Hermonassa. This is absolutely logical since these signs were found in cities surrounded by Sarmatians and aimed at the barbaric population of the outskirts of the Bosporus.

In Tanais, back in 1853, two important building inscriptions from the time of Reskuporid III (210-222) were found during excavations. Almost identical in content, they were installed in different places. At the southern gate (it was located right at the port, and the Greeks entered the city through this gate), the slab was made of simple limestone **[FIGURE 4]**. There is no tamga on this slab, but there is a mention of the name of the king:

[ἐπὶ
β]ασιλεῖ
Ῥησκουπό-
[ριδι]



[FIGURE 4]: CIRB 1246. The slab at the southern gate of Tanais, «RegionsNorth Shore of the Black Seaunspecified subregion CIRB 1246»: https://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/183986, accessed on 31/12/**2022.**

At the northern gate (facing the steppe, through which the Sarmatian nomads entered), the same inscription was made on spectacular marble. At the top, it was accompanied by the tamga of the king instead of his name **[FIGURE 5]**. This tamga of the king that replaced his name was a sign of royal power, understandable for nomads. In other words, the city administration was sure that the Sarmatians would be duly impressed by the royal tamga and the shine of polished marble; thus, it was worth spending extra money.

[FIGURE 5]: CIRB 1248. A slab at the northern gate of Tanais with a tamga, «Regions North Shore of the Black Seaunspecified subregion CIRB 1248»: https://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/183988, accessed on 31/12/2022.

IV. CONCLUSION

Tamgas were consistently used by Bosporan kings. They had several advantages: the legitimization of the Bosporan king's power by his connections with the nomadic Sarmatian elite; the image was succinct and concise; it was familiar to people associated with the Sarmatian nomadic world. All these advantages were significant when communicating with the Iranian population but were not obvious to the Greek population of Bosporus. Perhaps the plates with *tamgas* were unknown on the European Bosporus.

The cult of the Bosporan king, expressed, among other things, by the image of the royal *tamgas*, certainly found a response in the minds of the Sarmatian settlers on the territory of Bosporus. *Tamgas* showed the kinship ties of the king with the Sarmatian clans. The symbol of this connection was the royal *tamgas*, which became popular in that part of the Bosporus where the Iranians had a high specific gravity and influence.

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